



Governor's Proposed FY23 Budget Adjustments

Appropriations Hearing

HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

Thursday, February 24th, 2022

Helen McAlinden

President and CEO

Homes with Hope - Westport

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Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023. I am here to discuss the important investments through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is Helen McAlinden and I work in Westport/Norwalk Area and am a resident of Fairfield, CT. I have worked with the most vulnerable in need of housing and DMHAS services for almost two decades and am advocating today that you support this important request for increased funding to support our work.

I am an active member of the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut, a member of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness and a member and the Co-Chair of Opening Doors Fairfield County Advocacy Committee. I, alongside many other partners in the state, know that safe, affordable, and permanent housing coupled with supportive case management and support services is the only solution to homelessness. When our state's residents have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. During COVID-19, the need for case management supports for all of Connecticut's residents has become even more crucial and especially important to us supporting the most vulnerable with housing insecurities.

I respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals and expansions from the Governor's budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS):

With this needed support Homelessness is solvable. Connecticut can make homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time experience by investing in what works: housing, coupled with supportive services, and the people and infrastructure that support our most vulnerable residents.

Homes with Hope and other nonprofit organizations providing shelter, homeless outreach, diversion, rapid-rehousing, housing navigation, supportive housing, and housing case management make up the front line of Connecticut's homeless response system. Front line housing and homeless service providers play an essential

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public health role, made even more apparent and critical during the pandemic. Since the onset of COVID-19, the front lines have decompressed shelters, held vaccine clinics, quickly matched individuals and families to housing, and much more. Our front-line workers keep our communities safe, saving lives and saving the state money.

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The Reaching Home Campaign is encouraged by the legislature's increase to nonprofit provider funding in both FY22 & 23; however, a significant funding gap remains among homeless and housing services organizations. Connecticut must address this funding gap by PLEASE:

1. Supporting the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance long-term plan to restore at least \$461 million to community nonprofits, which includes housing and homeless service organizations.

2. Providing an additional \$13.34 million in FY 23 to provide homeless and housing service organizations funding for adequate wages, benefits, and professional development for front line workers, increasing rent and utility costs, and better access to technology via: Together, these investments represent a 35.06% increase for all housing and service provider contracts administered by the state, which account for the rate of inflation since 2016. This funding would allow Connecticut's homeless response system to work as designed – to respond to people's housing emergencies and allow housing and homeless service providers to hire and retain qualified staff.

Fully funding housing and homeless service organizations means they will be better equipped to adequately support individuals and families facing homelessness. By providing the necessary resources for staff and operational capacity, we can ensure Connecticut's homeless response system is able to respond to housing crises quickly and effectively, provide fair compensation to essential workers for essential work, and ultimately ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony, and for your hard work making important and life-saving decisions as we look to shape Connecticut's future beyond the pandemic– it is with your support that we can help make sure Connecticut's residents are healthy and stably housed.

Sincerely,

Helen McAlinden
President and CEO
Homes with Hope

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